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The Lie Detector Lies

The use of lie detectors for ferreting out the inadequate from among those seeking top security or other important work in government has suffered another serious setback. Researchers of the Hoover Institution of Stanford University say that there are times when the lie detector turns out a result contrary to the truth.

In other words, the lie detector lies and the institution group says proof of this is available. Thus another link is being forged in the chain discrediting extensive use of lie detectors until such time as there are proper safeguards.

The lie detector may be said to record the emotions. It shows differences in blood pressure, nerve tensions and breathing which change in reaction to special questions. Presumably the guilty react more vigorously. But the Hoover group says this is good in theory but wrong in practice.

It points out that a man brought up in a somewhat rigid family atmosphere, strongly endowed with moral standards and the like, will react strongly when questions involving morals are asked. The lie detector will show this reaction and immediately

place that individual in the suspicious or uncertain category when actually this individual is the type of person preferred. By the same token, people of slipshod or contrary moral structure do not react to such questions and therefore are labeled as suitable material to be hired when they are the type who should be shunned.

The Hoover Institution project involved prospects for CIA appointments. If the lie detector is proven inadequate for the CIA, it should not be used elsewhere in government.

Use of the lie detector is prevalent in Washington where within the last two years the practice has occasioned doubts. There is no set rule for procedure and there is no established course for training operators. With doubt cast on the human equation and now doubt on the functions of the machine itself, the lie detector is not all that it pretends to be. If, as the research group says, it does the opposite of that which is required, then it is time to get rid of the machine. The lie detector has the task of sorting the wheat from the chaff among humanity. If it persists in doing the contrary, junk it.